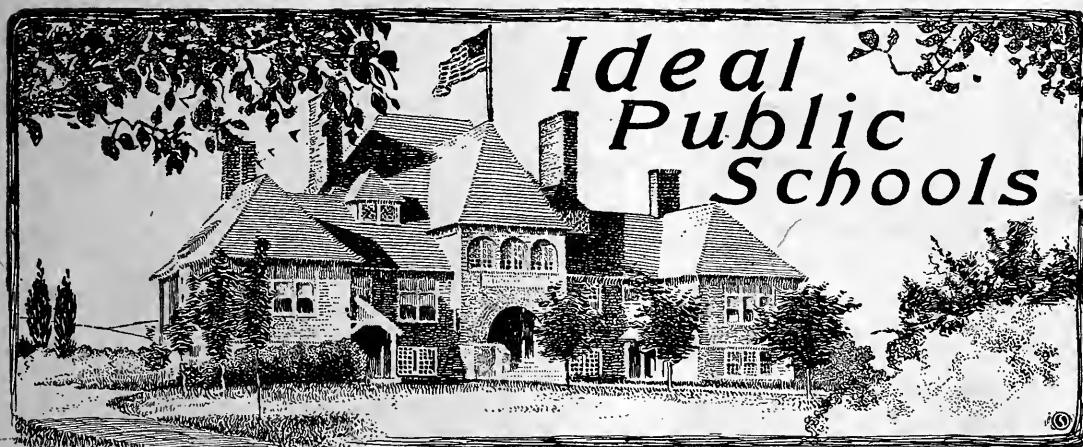


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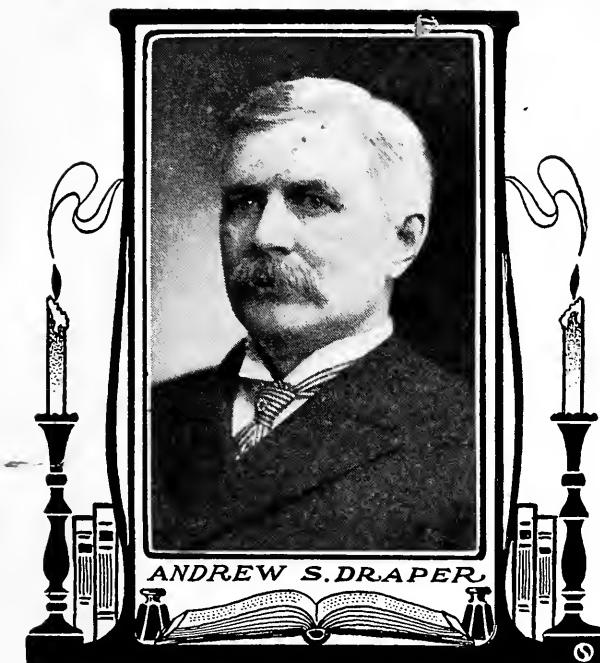
*By Pres. Andrew S. Draper
Of the University of Illinois.*

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Ideal Public Schools.

[Reprinted from *The Youth's Companion*, Feb. 14, 1901.]



BOYS and girls hardly understand the purposes of the public schools. They think very little about the principles upon which our great school system, in which there are half a million of teachers and fifteen millions of pupils, and which costs two hundred million dollars each year, is maintained. They do not trouble themselves over the ways by which the system is to accomplish its purposes and justify all it costs. Too many parents give little thought to the matter.

The impression of the people who do not think very hard about it is that the schools are to teach pupils to read and write, and use numbers, and know something about birds and flowers, and countries and peoples, and the like. The schools are to do this; but they are weak indeed and they are not worth what they cost unless they do a great deal more.

All of our states make laws requiring the people to maintain schools for all the children. Nearly all the people would do this without any law. The people of each state make the laws in order that if there are any who do not want to support schools, they will be compelled to do so. In this way, throughout the country, a school

is sure to be within reach of every home. Nearly all of the cities and towns have established high schools, and many of the states have set up great state universities. All this is to build up self-respecting character and develop sound views of life, to train up good citizens and make the states and the republic safe; it is not only to give every child an equal chance with every other, but to impel every one to make the most of his chance.

That is the ideal purpose of the schools. To come near attaining it, the school must come near being ideal. We are very likely to judge of a school by the looks of the schoolhouse. We may make a mistake, but we are very likely to be right.

If we see a building that is attractive, with trees about it, and with some green sod and flower-beds in the summer-time, and with a whole and bright American flag floating over it, we shall be likely to find

that things are about as they should be inside. If the building looks ugly and the grounds are unkempt and the flag ragged, we shall be likely to find that the schoolhouse is dirty and unhealthful. We shall also be likely to find that the teacher is lazy and the pupils listless, and the work of little account.

Importance of "Good Looks."

THERE may be cases in which this is not so. Clothes do not make the man, it is true, but in normal business conditions clothes indicate the qualities of the man. A business man who is cleanly and neatly dressed is probably a much better and stronger man than one who looks shabby, because the better man will usually look well. So a rickety and particularly a dirty schoolhouse is almost as certain proof of a weak school, as a four-days'-old beard, a dirty shirt and baggy trousers are commonly indicative of a cheap kind of business man. People who know the value of a good school will provide a good home for it, and in turn the good home will help the school to grow better.

A true teacher, well sustained, will make an

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IDEAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ideal school; but true teachers are few, or, at least, they seem few because so many people who are really unable to teach well want to work at it for the pay, and are allowed to do so. Here is the greatest trouble in building up ideal schools.

The Ideal Teacher.

A N ideal teacher must first of all be an ideal man or woman. It is not enough that a teacher does not lie or swear or cheat. There are plenty of people trying to teach school who do not do any of those things, and yet they do very little teaching. No one teaches well unless he has the respect of pupils, and he cannot have that unless he is a self-respecting character. If he is this, he will be neat in person, regular in his mode of life, honorable in his treatment of others, and sincere in his purpose to make the most of himself and do the most he can for others.

An efficient teacher will be well-informed. He will know what has occurred in the world, and what is happening every day. If he knows only a little about numbers and geography and the like, and does little but go over the routine of these things year after year, he will shrivel up and ought to blow away. He must read the newspapers and magazines and the best books, and he must travel and see things if he would be of use to a school.

A teacher must not only know all about what he tries to teach, but he must know how to teach. He must have studied the minds of children, and the best ways of gaining their interest and of leading them to act for themselves. A true teacher will like children, not only the inordinately good ones, who too often die young, but the other and more common kind, who are wilful and perhaps ugly and shirk work if they can, but who generally grow up and become very decent men and women, after all.

Sympathy with Play.

A TEACHER must enter into the life of pupils, their work and their sports. One who only tolerates play because he cannot help it ought to be relegated to the retired list of the "Army of Martyrs," as teachers are sometimes called. He would have no claim, however, to a pension, for he has never been a good soldier in that army.

A true teacher will be master of the school,

and so undisputed a master that he will not be afraid to let pupils have all the freedom they like so long as it does not interfere with the work of the school. Children are not simpletons. They dislike rule and hate watchers and keepers, but they laugh at teachers who are "easy" or "soft." They respect and love manly men and womanly women.

The true test of a school is the extent to which the pupils do things for themselves because they like to do them. The amount of work each child does, the length of the course or the number of studies he takes, is not of so much matter as that he shall get interested in some things and do them for himself.

The greater number of children never become enthusiastic over anything. They lead only ordinary lives. Nothing quickens their souls or stirs them to real, high-minded effort. A teacher who can wake a child up and get him to working for something is a real teacher. Such a teacher will have learned that this cannot be accomplished by terrorizing the child, or by trying to shape the life of the child just like his own life. The work of the school must be of a kind which the child can like to do. If the child enjoys one kind of work better than another, he should be encouraged most in the kind he likes best. Let him learn to like something; let him accomplish something, and in a little time he will like other and greater things.

Problems of Graded Schools.

THE necessity of the close grading and the separation of pupils into different rooms in the large schools has certain disadvantages. When the younger pupils mingled with the older ones and heard them recite, they derived an advantage from it. They saw what was ahead of them, and often they were roused by it.

The fact that in the graded schools the grade above is the main judge of the work in the grade below, and that the greatest desire of the pupil is to pass into the next grade, has disadvantages as well as advantages. An ideal teacher will know what the disadvantages are and make them as small as possible. He will do genuine and honest work without too much reference to the teacher in the next room. Thoughtful people who build schoolhouses will put an assembly-room into every house, where all may come together and get the good which comes from the general meeting. It seems practically impossible to do for the child



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what the schools are set to do, unless the pupils of different ages intermingle.

Probably the greatest danger to the public school system is that people who are able to send their children to private schools will become dissatisfied with the public schools and withdraw their children and their support from them. They find, in some cases, that the public school-houses are untidy or unhealthful, or that the public school teachers are too uncultivated for association with their children, or are unable to interest and instruct them. If this should become true to any great extent, it would be a very serious hurt to the public schools, because the strongest point about them is that they are common to all, to the well-to-do and the rich as well as to the poor. American people in comfortable circumstances will not pay twice for the education of their children without feeling much annoyed at the necessity, and they show less courage than they ought to show if they do not make a very vehement and effectual protest.

This trouble is to be rigidly guarded against. A schoolhouse which is not neat enough and healthful enough for a rich man's child is not fit for a poor man's child. A teacher whose personal appearance or whose ways are unpleasant or hurtful to a child from the home of cultivated people is unfit to have charge of a child from any home. A teacher who cannot teach well-bred children is an offense to all children. The public schools are bound to be the best and most efficient there are, well worthy of all the homes they assume to serve.

Schools Steadily Improving.

IT must not be assumed from what has been said that the writer thinks that the American public schools are poor, or that the teachers cannot teach. The public schools are, in general, better than they ever were before. The people are more intelligent; the standards are steadily advancing; the schools must steadily improve. The teaching force in our school system is far from ideal, but it is generally conscientious. The teachers advance wherever the conditions encourage them to do so. Where the people

manage the schools upon principles which approach the ideal, the teachers improve in spirit and accumulate teaching power with great rapidity.

Ideal schools will result from the intelligence and the spirit of the people. People are not likely to have good schools unless they know the difference between good schools and poor ones. Even then they are not likely to have good schools unless they are very earnest about it. Wherever the people allow mere self-seekers to become members of school boards, and let them appoint and promote teachers through favoritism, and in defiance of the advice of experienced professional superintendents, the schools will be weak.

The Responsibility of Parents.

IF the people will generate enough civic energy to secure laws which will enable them to protect their children against incompetents, and true teachers against association and competition with the unworthy; if they will remember that laws do not execute themselves, but require executors who are truly ambitious for the best that can be obtained; then the schools will be likely to approach the ideal.

Wherever a teacher's tenure of position does not depend upon a true spirit and upon increasing expertness in teaching, there are likely to be poor schools. In such cases there will be no standards, and the teaching will be reckless and unscientific. Jealousies will prevail among the teachers. It will be necessary to make rules covering almost every act to prevent the so-called teachers from doing harm. These rules will keep those who might be true teachers from doing good.

Wherever school boards will secure a capable and just superintendent, and cooperate with him in a policy which will give every teacher the right to know that a higher position and better pay in the schools will surely reward a genial and steady spirit, and that increasing respect in society will as surely follow patience and thoroughness in work, the schools will certainly advance toward the best ideals.



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